

Amendments to the Claims: This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A vacuum distillation plant, comprising:
 - a) a flash evaporator for producing an overhead product and a bottoms product;
 - b) a vapour concentration means and downstream of said flash evaporator to receive said overhead product;
 - c) a multi-stage condenser ~~positioned~~ downstream of the said vapour concentration means;
 - d) rectification means between said condenser stages; and

wherein ~~e)~~ means for recycling at least part of the a condensate from a condensation stage to the said bottoms product, ~~are included.~~
2. (Canceled)
3. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1, wherein the condenser is positioned in such way that the bottoms product serves as a heat carrier liquid for the condenser before being recycled to the evaporator.
4. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1 wherein two to four condensation stages are provided with a rectification interposed between each of said condensation stages.
5. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1, wherein all or part of the condensate of the last condensation stage is recycled to the evaporator.
6. (Original) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 5 comprising 2 condensation stages.
7. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1 wherein the condensate is fed into the evaporator above the liquid level of the bottoms product.
8. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1 wherein the condensate is introduced into and mixed with the bottoms product and the mixture is introduced into the evaporator.

9. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1, additionally comprising means for actively directing the bottoms product through the condenser.

10. (Original) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 9 wherein the means for actively directing the bottoms product is a circulating pump.

11. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1 comprising a pre-vacuum pump in addition to the concentration means.

12. (Original) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 11, wherein the pre-vacuum pump is an oil-driven liquid-ring pump.

13. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 1, comprising a means on the distillate side for depositing solid and/or liquid components entrained by the overhead product during flash evaporation.

14. (Currently Amended) A process for the ~~inoffensive~~ concentration of aqueous alcoholic solutions having a fixed water to alcohol ratio wherein:

a) the solution is expanded under vacuum to form an overhead product and a bottoms product;

b) ~~the overhead product is transported volumetrically and concentrated~~ pressurizing and transporting said overhead product to a multi-stage condenser;

c) ~~the overhead product is condensed in several stages for separating on said overhead product~~ into its less volatile and more volatile components; and

d) using at least part of the condensate off from at least one stage of said condenser is recycled to the form a bottoms product having a desired concentration before said bottoms product is for recycle reused in to step a) until the desired concentration has been reached.

15. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 14 wherein the bottoms product is used as ~~the~~ a heat carrier liquid for the condensation stages.

16. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 14, wherein two condensation steps are carried out in step c) starting from binary solutions and wherein at least part of the condensate of the second stage is recycled to the bottoms product.

17. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 14, wherein the condensate is recycled in ~~such~~ an amount so that the water/alcohol ratio of the solution in the bottoms product remains constant.

18. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 14, wherein the bottoms product is distilled by flash evaporation.

19. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 14 including the steps of concentrating aqueous ethanolic plant drug extracts having an ethanol content of at least 20 vol.-%.

20. (Canceled)

21. (Canceled)

22. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 2, wherein the condenser is positioned in such way that the bottoms product serves as a heat carrier liquid for the condenser before being recycled to the evaporator.

23. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 2, wherein two to four condensation stages are provided with a rectification interposed between each of said condensation stages.

24. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 3, wherein two to four condensation stages are provided with a rectification interposed between each of said condensation stages.

25. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 2, wherein all or part of the condensate of the last condensation stage is recycled to the evaporator.

26. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 3, wherein all or part of the condensate of the last condensation stage is recycled to the evaporator.

27. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 4, wherein all or part of the condensate of the last condensation stage is recycled to the evaporator.

28. (Currently Amended) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim ~~23~~, wherein the condensate is fed into the evaporator above the liquid level of the bottoms product.

29. (Currently Amended) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 3, wherein the condensate is fed into the evaporator above the liquid level of the bottoms product.

30. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 4, wherein the condensate is fed into the evaporator above the liquid level of the bottoms product.

31. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 5, wherein the condensate is fed into the evaporator above the liquid level of the bottoms product.

32. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 6, wherein the condensate is fed into the evaporator above the liquid level of the bottoms product.

33. (Currently Amended) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 23, wherein the condensate is introduced into and mixed with the bottoms product and the mixture is introduced into the evaporator.

34. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 3, wherein the condensate is introduced into and mixed with the bottoms product and the mixture is introduced into the evaporator.

35. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 4, wherein the condensate is introduced into and mixed with the bottoms product and the mixture is introduced into the evaporator.

36. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 5, wherein the condensate is introduced into and mixed with the bottoms product and the mixture is introduced into the evaporator.

37. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation plant according to claim 6, wherein the condensate is introduced into and mixed with the bottoms product and the mixture is introduced into the evaporator.

38. (Previously Presented) A vacuum distillation according to claim 7, wherein the condensate is introduced into and mixed with the bottoms product and the mixture is introduced into the evaporator.

39. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 15, wherein two condensation steps are carried out in step c) starting from binary solutions and wherein at least part of the condensate of the second stage is recycled to the bottoms product.

40. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 15, wherein the condensate is recycled in such an amount that the water/alcohol ratio of the solution in the bottoms product remains constant.

41. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 16, wherein the condensate is recycled in such an amount that the water/alcohol ratio of the solution in the bottoms product remains constant.

42. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 15, wherein the bottoms product is distilled by flash evaporation.

43. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 16, wherein the bottoms product is distilled by flash evaporation.

44. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 17, wherein the bottoms product is distilled by flash evaporation.

45. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 15, including the steps of concentrating aqueous ethanolic plant drug extracts having an ethanol content of at least 20 vol.-%.

46. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 16, including the steps of concentrating aqueous ethanolic plant drug extracts having an ethanol content of at least 20 vol.-%.

47. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 17, including the steps of concentrating aqueous ethanolic plant drug extracts having an ethanol content of at least 20 vol.-%.

48. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 18, including the steps of concentrating aqueous ethanolic plant drug extracts having an ethanol content of at least 20 vol.-%.

49. (Previously Presented) A process according to claim 14, including the step of concentrating aqueous ethanolic plant drug extracts having an ethanol content of from 30 to 70 vol.-%.

50. (New) A process for concentrating an aqueous alcoholic solution without negatively affecting the properties of the concentrated extract from said process wherein:

- a) the solution is expanded under vacuum to form an overhead product and a bottoms product;
- b) pressurizing and transporting said overhead product to a multi-stage condenser;
- c) separating said overhead product into its less volatile and more volatile components; and
- d) using at least part of the condensate from at least one stage of said condenser to form a bottoms product having a desired concentration for recycle to step a).

51. (New) A process according to claim 50, wherein said aqueous alcoholic solution is a plant extract.

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Amendments to the Drawings:

The attached red inked sketch shows proposed changes to Figure 1.

Attachment